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# PHSB STUDIES

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## PREMARITAL AND POSTMARITAL CONCEPTION AND THE RISK OF FETAL AND INFANT DEATH

How many brides are pregnant when married? What are the chances their offspring will experience fetal death (stillbirth) or infant death? Are children who are both conceived and born out of wedlock more prone than others to die prenatally or in their first year of life?

To answer these questions, we divided all deliveries (live births and fetal deaths) into the following three groups:

*Postmarital - Consists of all conceptions by legally married women.*

*Premarital - This group consists of conceptions before marriage with delivery after marriage. Thus, it consists of the offspring of pregnant brides.*

*Illegitimate - An illegitimate delivery is one which occurs to a woman who has never been legally married or who has been widowed or legally divorced from her husband in excess of 280 days; the child was both conceived and born out of wedlock.*

The first two groups are subdivisions of legitimate births. In order to identify premarital and postmarital conceptions, we matched resident legitimate birth and fetal death records for 1973-75 to marriage records for 1973 and 1974. Since our marriage records include only those events taking place in North Carolina, we requested marriage records from South Carolina and Virginia where either the bride, groom or both were North Carolina residents. After matching marriage and birth records, we selected as premarital conceptions those matches with weeks of gestation more than three weeks greater than weeks of marriage. Moreover, no matches with 40 or more weeks of marriage were selected. Using these two criteria, we established two data files—one for premarital and one for postmarital conceptions. Having done this, we matched birth certificate numbers from our marriage-birth file to 1974 birth certificates which had been matched to an infant death certificate. Thus, we were able to identify those in the premarital and postmarital groups who met with fetal or infant death.

No special procedures were required to obtain statistics on illegitimate deliveries as all required information could be obtained from existing data files.

### Pregnant Brides

While most of this study deals with data relative to 1974 deliveries, we selected records from the matched marriage-birth file by year of marriage to obtain the number of pregnant brides in a given year.

An estimated one of every eight North Carolina brides in 1973 was pregnant when she married. The number of pregnant brides dropped from 6,223 in 1973 to 5,461 in 1974. While the number of marriages and births also declined over the same period, neither declined as rapidly as the number of pregnant brides. One possible explanation for this was the rapid increase in teenage abortions over the same time period. The number of teenage abortions increased from 4,100 in 1973 to 6,179 in 1974 and 7,474 in 1975.